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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0614
INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 9145
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 2923
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 2895
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ SEP LIMA 0071
RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA 3106
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO 0652
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 2976
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA 4335
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 0068
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
RUEHDG/AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO 2351
RUEHC/DEPT OF INTERIOR WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS BOGOTA 002930

SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: ENVIRONMENTAL CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS SOFT POWER OF
U.S. MILITARY

¶1. (U) Summary: SOUTHCOM sponsored its second annual Marine Environmental Protection Conference in Cartagena from August 31-September 4. The conference introduced the Colombian Navy to a wide range of marine environmental enforcement issues and generated productive discussion among the participants: Colombian Navy, NGOs, government ministries and several USG agencies. One notable success, conference participants collaborated on an outline for a marine environmental enforcement operations manual for use by Navy instructors and officers in the field. End Summary.

PRODUCTIVE INTERACTION AMONG KEY PLAYERS

¶2. (U) SOUTHCOM, with assistance from Embassy Bogota's Economic Section, scored its second successful environmental protection conference in Colombia, August 31-September 4. The event in Cartagena succeeded in opening a space for dialogue among the Colombian military, government, and NGOs on strategies for protecting the country's marine resources. More than 100 Colombian participants from the Navy, NGOs, and government ministries attended. Participants highlighted the need for continued training and capacity building for the Colombian Navy in enforcing Colombia's marine environment laws. Presenters from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) provided best practices in marine enforcement techniques. EconCouns highlighted the U.S. commitment to the environment and the economic importance of Colombia's fishing trade.

NASCENT ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS

¶3. (U) The Colombian Navy has broad enforcement authority of Colombia's maritime laws, but has focused nearly all of its efforts and training on anti-drug operations. The burden of enforcing environmental laws has fallen to NGOs and local governments, who have limited resources and capabilities for enforcement. The Colombian Coast Guard, a subset of the Colombian Navy, is a temporary assignment for most Navy officers. These factors plus the rotational nature of Colombian Naval assignments has resulted in little institutional knowledge of environmental law enforcement practices. This year's conference targeted a higher level

group of officers than last year, including port captains, to heighten the visibility of environmental issues in the Navy.

¶4. (U) Fisheries enforcement authority is divided among many agencies but is largely in the hands of the Colombian Agricultural Institute (ICA), a part of the Ministry of Agriculture. ICA personnel are extremely knowledgeable on fishery issues but have little capability to enforce or manage their fisheries. ICA representatives at the conference helped organize the daily working groups.

CONFERENCE TAKEAWAYS

¶5. (U) Conference topics featured: fishing and wildlife trade regulations, environmental enforcement program management and best practices, vessel boarding techniques, oil spill containment, and reducing contaminants and by-catch through the use of mechanisms like Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs). (Note: NOAA provided training on the use of TEDs to local officials the week prior. End Note.) During the conference, participants split into working groups to develop an outline for a handbook for use by the Colombian Navy, and discussed what future conferences should include.

¶6. (SBU) Local presenters highlighted illegal fishing as the biggest threat to the sustainability of Colombia's fisheries, especially on the island of San Andres (located off the coast of Nicaragua) where the maritime boundaries of a number of Caribbean countries intersect. A representative from the San Andres Governor's office estimated that up to 50

percent of all fishing in San Andres is illegal, much of which he blamed on Nicaraguan and Dominican vessels.

WAY FORWARD

¶7. (U) NGOs and military officials agreed that the two annual conferences succeeded in opening up a conversation between NGOs, government, and the military about the importance of enforcement of marine environmental laws. Both NGOs and military officials commented that future conferences should focus more on capacity building. The conference also helped create institutional knowledge, notably via the collaborative effort that produced the outline for a Colombian Navy operations manual. This manual will be the basis of a new course on environmental enforcement at the Navy's training school -- the first of its kind.

¶8. (U) The Ministry of Environment (MoE) and ICA seek to develop a nation-wide observer program for fishing boats with training assistance from NOAA. The director of Conservation International (CI) stated that promoting conservation efforts in San Andres, an important way station for migratory birds and marine life, is the single most important marine environment issue in Colombia. CI would like to set up a fund for San Andres' SeaFlower Biosphere Protected Area, similar to that of Malpelo to help fund a dedicated environmental enforcement patrol boat.

COMMENT: CHALLENGES TO SUCCESSFUL ENFORCEMENT

¶9. (SBU) This year's conference took another important step in reinforcing to the Navy the economic and social value of enforcing fishing and environmental laws. But several challenges remain: the inter-agency process is weak, the MoE is not a political heavyweight, and the Ministry of Defense does not assist in coordinating between the MoE and military (Navy). Prosecution of violators is also a challenge -- the fishing industry has good lawyers, the legal process is long and involved, and local governments do not have the resources to provide all of the evidence required to prosecute. NGOs underlined that more long-term commitment is needed from the military in order to protect Colombia's marine resources. Continued focus on capacity-building would be a step in the right direction since Navy captains note that "a boat full of

drugs is still much more valuable than a boat full of illegal
catch."
Nichols